

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5286

As of January 23, 2009

Title: An act relating to exemptions from the WorkFirst program.

Brief Description: Regarding exemptions from the WorkFirst program.

Sponsors: Senators Regala, Hargrove and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/23/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

Background: WorkFirst is Washington's program of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under WorkFirst, recipients of public assistance are assessed prior to referral to job search activities. Information obtained through the assessment is used to develop an individual responsibility plan that includes an employment goal; a plan for obtaining employment as quickly as possible; and a description of services available to enable the recipient to obtain and keep employment.

Unless a good cause exemption applies, TANF recipients must be engaged in work or work activities as a condition of continued eligibility. Under Washington law, a parent with a child under the age of one year has a "good cause" reason for failure to participate in a WorkFirst program. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) may require any recipient with a child under one year to participate in mental health, alcohol, or drug treatment, domestic violence services or parenting education or skills training for up to 20 hours per week, if such treatment, services, or training is indicated by its comprehensive assessment.

The good cause exemption for a parent with a child under the age of one year is limited to a maximum of 12 months over the parent's lifetime.

Summary of Bill: DSHS may not require a parent to participate in WorkFirst activities during the first 90 days following the birth of a child. Following that 90 day period, DSHS must notify the parent of the availability of mental health, drug, or alcohol treatment, domestic violence services or parenting education or skills training, and encourage the parent

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to participate in the treatment, services, or training, if indicated by the parent's pre-existing comprehensive evaluation. DSHS must also notify the parent of the availability of child care support while that parent participates in the treatment, services, or training.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 17, 2009.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Single parents with newborn children have a hard enough time getting themselves together without also having to deal with work and services requirements. Sanctions for noncompliance are aimed at the parents but the child is also hurt. Research has shown how important it is for parents to bond with their newborn children and this bill would allow that bonding to occur. The original goals stated in SB 6016 for the 2007 session still hold true with this bill. This bill merely clarifies what the Legislature intended to do when it passed SB 6016.

OTHER: Any fiscal impact as a result of this bill would be very small. Of the 8,500 parents who would qualify for this exemption, only about 30 have been sanctioned; therefore, the fiscal impact, if any, would be quite small.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Monica Peabody, POWER; Donna Christensen, Washington State Catholic Conference; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society.

OTHER: Leo Ribas, DSHS.